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Editorial

Any conflict has two perpetrators, and there are invariably faults on each side which cause and exacerbate it. It takes two to make a fight. If one party withdraws itself from the region of conflict then the other will remain alone there: it will have none to fight against and the conflict will disappear.

If, on the other hand, each party waits for peace initiatives to come from the other side before undertaking conciliatory moves of its own, then the mistrust between the two sides will continue to grow. The inevitable result will be escalation of the conflict between them.

Hindu-Muslim communal riots, which have become a regular feature of Indian life, are example of such conflict, which can only be ended by unilateral *action* from one side. There are examples in the life of the Prophet of Islam which show that it is the Muslims who should take this initiative. Worldly rivalry and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims means that the latter see Islam, not in its true light, but through the tainted vision of their own prejudice: Muslims are their enemies so they adopt an antagonistic posture towards Islam as well. This is a situation which should be intolerable to Muslims, whose overriding concern should be for the true message of Islam to reach other peoples in all its purity, and in an atmosphere conducive to objective and dispassionate consideration. Seeing that such an atmosphere cannot be generated where there is conflict and mistrust, they should ensure an end to conflicts with other peoples; they should take unilateral steps for peace, without waiting for the initiative to come from the other side.

This is exactly what the Prophet of Islam did at Hudaibiya (6AH). By refusing to be provoked in the face of harassment from the Quraish, and accepting all their demands, he put an end to a conflict which had been raging for twenty years. In doing so he defused the tension which had marked relations between Muslims and their non-Muslim compatriots. The result of his seemingly capitulatory action, as the Quran tells us and history verifies, was a "clear victory" for the Muslims.

If the Muslims are to detonate the sitting bomb of communal riots, as it is their duty to do, they can only do so by following the example of the Prophet, and refusing to be provoked, even in the face of provocation from the other side. Failure to do this can only result in further escalation in a conflict which serves only to distort Islam in the eyes of other, especially their adversaries.

We Offer You Our Love

There is a verse in the second chapter of the Qur'an (Al-Baqara) which reads like this:

There are some who make others equal to God, bestowing on them the adoration due to God, and the love of God is stronger in the faithful. But if only they could see their punishment, the wrongdoers would know that might is His alone, and that God is stern in retribution.

(2:165)

Man is forced by his very nature, and by the circumstances in which he finds himself on earth, to seek some external source of dependence. Unable to rely on his own scant inner resources, he seeks a prop in life – one who will compensate for his own shortcomings. To take another person or thing to oneself in this way is to worship it. Feelings of adoration and devotion are then directed towards one's object of worship, for to worship something is to love it above all things.

Since God is not visible in this world, man – wanting to see something before he will believe it – usually stands one who can be seen in the place that should be allotted to God alone. Usually it is charismatic leaders who occupy this spot, “greats” in the sight of men, people who have captured the popular imagination. Such leaders are accorded the adulation that should be accorded to God alone. Faced with an inner vacancy, a yawning gap in his soul that had to be filled, man should have turned to God for replenishment, but he turned instead to other men.

The highest form of spiritual consciousness is true, pure love. How can one not love God when one sees that all sublime qualities come together in His majestic Being; when one realizes that whatever man owns is His divine gift; when one observes the world of nature, and is filled with wonderment at the beauty and perfection of the Maker of such a magnificent work of art. Such is God, and when one discovers one like Him, then it is only natural that one should be filled with love and devotion for Him.

Man has nothing greater to give anyone than love. This being the case, it is impossible for one to discover God – in all His perfection – and then to offer Him something less than love. Neither is any offering less than love acceptable to God, nor is it proper for man to offer his Lord anything less than pure, true love.

The Qur'an and Continental Drift

There are many statements in the Qur'an that are in astonishing accordance with modern scientific theories. One such statement is this reference to continental drift:

And the earth He extended after that; and then drew from it water and pastures.

(79:30-31)

These words correspond exactly with the modern theory of drifting continents. According to this theory, all seven continents of the world were once parts of one massive land mass. They then split up, and spread over the surface of the globe. Thus a world of several separate continents, divided by massive seas, came into being.

This theory was first put forward in 1915 by a German geologist named Alfred Wegener. The reason he gave was that if all the continents are placed close to one another, they all fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. This can be very clearly seen in the correlation between the east coast of South America and the west coast of Africa.

There are many other like-features of this nature to be found on both sides of wide oceans: similar mountains, strata of rock dating back to the same geological period, animals, fish and plants of like species, and so on. So this is not just a geological theory: botanists are also almost unanimously agreed, as Professor Ronald Good has pointed out in his book, *Geography of the Flowering Plants*, that there is no way of explaining the various plants found in different parts of the world, without assuming that the land masses of the world were once joined together.

Now that fossil magnetism also confirms this theory, it is taken as an established scientific fact. Study of rock faces has revealed the latitude and longitude at which their strata lay in ancient times. From this has emerged the fact that present land masses were not previously in the same positions as they are found today. Rather, they were in the very same positions that the theory of drifting continents would expect them to be. Survey of stones in India, for example, shows with certainty that 70 million years ago India was situated south of the equator. The rocks of South Africa prove that some 300 million years ago, the continent of Africa broke off from the Antarctic.

The Arabic word used in the verse quoted above is "dahw". This word signifies the dispersal and scatterment of something that is joined together. A typical Arabic sentence, using this word, would be: 'daha al-matru al-hisa 'an wajhi-lardi', that is: 'the rain has scattered stones all about the land'. This is almost exactly the same meaning as that of the English word 'drift', which has been used in modern times to describe this theory. This astonishing resemblance between the language of the Quran and that of modern science, shows without doubt that the Quran is word of a Being whose knowledge encompasses both past and present.

Mindful of Others, Forgetful of Oneself

Dennis Potter recently reviewed a new book by Bernard Levin, the famous "*Times*" columnist. The book, entitled "*Enthusiasms*", did not meet with his approval. "A blubber of a book", he calls it. Mr. Levin's style comes in for particularly heavy criticism. Among his comments in this regard are: "indiscriminate gusher", "mudflats of sentences", "an almost unbroken swamp of verbiage", and "elephantiasis of both prose and posture". (*Guardian Weekly*, December 25, 1983)

But in his review, Mr. Potter has himself committed serious errors of style, as Roger Woddis points out (Letters, *Guardian Weekly*, January 8, 1984). Particularly outstanding is the 68-word single sentence which makes up the second paragraph of his review. Readers might care to read it aloud to gain the full effect:

Perhaps he is indeed all of these things, but those whose stomachs are tough enough to absorb his Enthusiasms without a salt of wry can evacuate much of the fat by attending to sole intellectual pleasure this blunder of a book has to offer hunting down the secret, opposing tendencies, or the momentary apprehensions of caution and genuine tenderness, which qualify the passions squelching between the pages.

It is, as Mr. Woddis points out, a perfect illustration of the Potter calling the kettle black".

Those who are too busy criticizing the faults of others tend to forget their own.

To Disbelieve in God's Signs is to Disbelieve in God Himself

There is a verse in the second chapter of the Quran which says that there are some stones that “tumble down through fear of God.” (2:74) This is a reference to landslides, when stones crash tumultuously down mountainsides. Landslides in the world of nature are symbolic of a similar event in the world of man: spontaneous and headlong submission to God. An incident in the life of the Prophet's trusted lieutenant, Umer Ibn Khattab, illustrates the form that landslides take in the world of man – unhesitating capitulation before truth, like “stones, tumbling down a mountainside.”

The Companions were grief-stricken when they heard of the Prophet's death. Umer found it hard even to believe the news. Taking his sword, he stood up in the Prophet's mosque. “Some hypocrites think that the Prophet has died,” he said. “It is not so: he has gone to visit his Lord, as the Prophet Moses visited the Lord on Mount Sinai. When he stayed away from his people for forty days, some said that he had died. By God, the Prophet will return to us, as Moses returned to his people, and he will punish those who thought that he had died.”

Then Abu Bakr arrived on the scene. He told Umer to be quiet, but Umer continued to address the people. Seeing Umer's refusal to accede to his request, Abu Bakr himself began to address the congregation. “Whoever worshipped Mohammad,” he said, “should know that Mohammad has died. But as for those who worshipped God: God is alive, and will never die.” Abu Bakr then raised his voice, and recited this verse of the Quran:

“Mohammad is no more than an apostle: other apostles have passed away before him. If he dies or is slain, will you recant? He that recants will do no harm to God. But God will reward the thankful.”

(3:144)

Umer later recalled his reaction to hearing this verse:

“I was just stunned when I heard Abu Bakr recite this verse. My legs could not carry me, and I fell to the ground. I realized that the Prophet had indeed died.”

(Seerat Ibn Hisham, Vol IV, P335)

Umer's falling down on coming face to face with divine proof was just like stones crashing down from a height. Landslides are symbolic of fear of God, but Umer's “landslide” was fear of God in purely physical terms. God does not want man to be stubborn and arrogant when confronted with truth; He wants His servants to fall before Him in total submission and acceptance. Stones that slide down mountains show man what his reaction to truth should be – one of instant capitulation. Forgetting his power of refusal, he should act as if he has no power – like stones – and collapse, voluntarily, before God. That was how

Umer reacted when faced with truth. He collapsed, like stones crashing down a mountain. The difference was that his capitulation was voluntary, while landslides occur involuntarily. So lacking in reservation was Umer's action that it fell not one whit short of what God expected of him; it was a perfect replica of the demonstration in nature of the form that submission should take in man.

At that time it was just one verse of the Quran, just a few recited words, which had this effect upon Umer. He could have rejected these words.

If he had treated the matter as one of personal pride, and challenged the applicability of this verse, then he would have found many supporters among the people of Arabia. He could have excused himself on the pretext that he had not meant to deny the Prophet's death; he had only sought to keep it secret until the problem of succession had been solved. But for Umer this was not a matter of personal prestige, to be salvaged by denial or pretence; it was a matter of God coming before him in the form of truth, and he fell down in submission to it as if God Himself was standing before him.

There are always two types of people in the world: those whose spirits are ignited by the glory of God, and those who are animated instead by the greatness of others besides God, be the object of their veneration their own selves or any other. The first are monotheists, the second polytheists. It is the first group – those who nourish their souls on the greatness of God – who will enter heaven. The others – those who have fed their souls on the greatness of others besides God – will themselves be fuel for the fire of hell. Paradise is the kingdom of God: it can only be entered by those who live with Him, by Him, and for Him in the world. How can those who have taken others as their lords expect to be admitted to His kingdom?

All of God's prophets have been plain men, like any other. What distinguished them from others was the divine proof that they brought. It was on people's acceptance or rejection of this proof that their eternal fate hinged. Such divine proofs represent God on earth. To discover God is to see Him in His proofs, such as are evident in creation. As for those who fail to see Him in His signs, God will disregard them completely on the Day of Resurrection, and they will receive no share in His everlasting blessings.

Only clear minds can recognize clear proofs when shown to them, for only a mind free of all pride and prejudice can see truth in a clear light and accept it. The truth may be detrimental to one's self-interest, so only a mind clear of worldly attachment will attach value to the truth alone. To see clear proofs of God, and not to recognize them, means that one's mind is not on God – it is attached to other things; the greatness of mortals is lodged in one's heart. If one rises above worldly attachments, and sees only God as greater than one will have no difficulty realizing the truth of clear proofs.

In this world God comes before man in the form of clear proofs; in the next world He Himself will be plainly visible, in all His glory. He will be visible to man. Then, people will have no choice but to believe in Him. Even disbelievers will be stunned into submission when God appears in an aura of seraphic splendour. True believers, however, are those who react in this way when He comes before them in the

form of clear proofs. They believe in an invisible God, made manifest through His signs in this world, just as others will believe in Him when He becomes visible in the next world.

This is the great test of man in this world: to believe in a God who is invisible in Himself, but visible through His signs – both in nature and divine revelation. So categorical and clear are those divine proofs, that one who is sincere in his search for truth cannot fail to recognize them; he will bow before them as if they were God Himself; he will be as certain of their veracity as he would be if God – in all His glory and perfection – were made manifest; he will forget all thoughts of pride and self, and crash down from the heights of self-opinion, submitting humbly to the word of God. This is how a man of truth reacts to God's word when it comes to him. It is a reaction which the Quran has explained to us, nature has exhibited in the form of landslides, and Umer has demonstrated on a human level when he fell down on hearing Abu Bakr's recital of a verse of the Quran.

All to Play a Role

The film 'Gandhi', depicting the life of the father of Indian independence Mahatma Gandhi, cost £13 million to make. Sir Richard Attenborough, director of the film, had been trying for twenty years to make the film, but without success. No movie company was ready to sponsor 'Gandhi'; everyone thought that it would be totally uncommercial. But so successfully did Ben Kingsley play the role of Gandhi that the film has become one of the great box-office triumphs of recent times. In 1983 it won an unprecedented eight Oscar Awards, one of which went to Ben Kingsley for his performance as Gandhi.

Ben Kingsley's father was a doctor from Gujarat, India, married to an Englishwoman. Initially Ben Kingsley's name was Krishna Bhajni. Later he adopted the name Ben Kingsley. He was chosen to play the part of Gandhi because of his close physical resemblance to the Mahatma. After being selected, he made intensive preparations for his performance of the role.

Long before shooting was due to begin, Ben Kingsley came to India. He shaved his head to make it resemble Gandhi's bald skull. Since he was bulky, he started dieting and lost twenty kilos. He acquired a tan by remaining long hours in the sunlight. He memorized the story of the film from beginning to end. He packed his room with photographs of the Mahatma and watched time and time again, a 5-hour documentary on Gandhi's life. He practised yoga for two hours every day in order to acquire the habit of sitting cross-legged for long stretches in Gandhian Posture. Besides this, he used to work at the spinning-wheel for a couple of hours so that he would be able to work it as Gandhi did when shooting began.

Ben Kingsley had a special part to play in a film, and it was for this that he made such long preparation. Only after long and assiduous application did it become possible for him to play the role successfully. The Muslims call themselves the noblest nation on earth. They have a most important part to play, then, in human history. Will they be able to play this role successfully without preparing themselves for it?

(Translation Courtesy: Jamshed Ahmad Siddiqi)

10 November 1984

Seeing Religion in the Wrong Light

Many of those who lose interest in religion nowadays do so because they come into contact with religion in a form that does not appear to be fulfilling people's needs. Such a person was Bob Hawke, the present Australian prime minister. Brought up in a Congregational household, Bob Hawke became an agnostic during a visit to India in the 1950's. Explaining this, he said that while in Kerala he noticed that the people "were devout church-goers. It played a large part in their lives. On the other hand, I could not help but notice how irrelevant the church was to what the people really needed."

Due to the failure of Christianity, and other religions, to fulfill the needs of modern man, people have turned more and more away from religion. An opinion poll in the country that Bob Hawke governs, Australia, showed that more people believed in him (74%) than God (72%). A recent poll in France showed that "faith and religion" figured last on a list of values that the French considered most important in their lives: only 50% of those questioned, and 40% of the under-35's, attached any importance to those two values.

There is no doubt that the present unpopularity of religion is, to a certain extent, due to a distortion of people's aims in this world: they tend to want too much, or the wrong things, out of life, and they find religion unable to provide these things. But the predominant factor in this drift away from religion is the fact that religion has been presented in a false light. If people were to be shown religion as it really is, then they would find that it answered the call of their own inner souls; better able to define their aims in life, they would find religion in a unique position to provide them; people who now turn away from religion would be attracted towards it.

Browsing through a book-shop the other day, I came across a book that put a smile of delight on my face. It was entitled

"How to Be Happy Without Money"

I was about to buy it and live happily ever after, but I discovered that it cost 10 pounds sterling, and so I lost my chance at happiness.

Jihad Khazen, *Arab News* (Riyadh) 19-3-1984

Going on Further? The Eternal Journey

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1859-1943) was on his way to Azamgarh, U.P., by train. A railway guard, who was a disciple of his, came to meet him at a station. Just then a villager appeared and presented the Maulana with a bundle of sugarcane. The gift was accepted, and the Maulana asked one of his companions to have it weighed, and book it in the luggage compartment. "There is no need to have it booked," the guard volunteered; "I'll speak to the guard on this train. He will look after it." "But the guard will only accompany this train," the Maulana replied, "and I am going on further." The guard thought that Maulana Thanawi would be changing trains at some station. "Never mind," he said. "I will tell the guard to inform the guard on the next train. You won't have to bother about it." "But I am going on still further," the Maulana repeated. Astonished, the guard asked: "Where are you going? You told me a moment ago you were going to Azamgarh." Maulana Thanawi remained silent for a moment or two, and then replied: "I am going on to eternity. Which guard will accompany me there?"

The same is true, not only of rail journeys, but of all matters in life. Every affair should be looked at in its eternal context. A "guard" may give one temporary support in this world, but when one reaches the next world, there will be no one to lend a helping hand. If one keeps in mind that one is on the way to the hereafter, then one will consider everything which will become worthless there as worthless now, no matter how great a worldly price it may seem to command. One will give weight only to those things which will be of consequence in the next world, no matter how inconsequential they may seem in the world.

In this world, one may have command of impressive words which one uses to defy truth; but in the next world one will find oneself lost for words. One may wield one's power unjustly, content that one's victims will never be able to avenge one's wrongs; but in the next world one will be divested of all power. Beguiled by wealth, one may become proud in this world, but in the next world one will have nothing to be proud of; one will have left one's wealth behind in the world.

This is the basic difference between a man of true faith and a disbeliever. A disbeliever lives on earth as if he is going to stay here forever, while the hallmark of true faith is the belief that one is on the way to the next world. Basically, then, the distinction between belief and disbelief is a psychological one; but these two different attitudes to life make for vastly different practical lives – so different, in fact that one leads to hell, while the other paves the way to the gardens of paradise.

You are Being Watched

Television cameras have not, up till now, been allowed into either of the two houses of parliament in Great Britain. A campaign is at present under way to allow parliamentary proceedings to be televised. The House of Lords has voted, in December 1983, to allow the proceedings of the House to be televised for an experimental period, but the more important House of Commons remains reluctant. The reason for this reluctance is that “doubts remain about the wisdom of allowing in cameras which could show empty benches or MP’s asleep. Mr. Austin Mitchell, the Labour MP leading the campaign for television in Parliament, insisted this could be overcome by using remote controlled cameras” (*Guardian Weekly*, December 18, 1983)

This is a worldly camera. It can be avoided, or measures can be taken to ensure that it does not reveal one’s neglectful conduct. But God’s camera is forever watching over us, and recording our every deed. Man thinks that it too can be avoided, but on the Day of Resurrection a film showing all our actions will be replayed to us. It will show man neglectful of the truth, and wont to shirk his duty to God.

Thinking nothing of one's actions

Abdullah Ibn Umer says that his father, Umer, met Abu Musa Ashari and asked him if he would like to be given credit for what he had done in the company of the Prophet, and totally exonerated of his other actions. "Your good deeds would be like your evil ones, and your evil deeds like your good ones. You would neither be rewarded or punished," Umer said to him. "I would not agree to that, Commander of the faithful," Abu Musa replied. "By God, when I arrived in Basra, its people were a cruel lot. I taught them the Quran, and the way of the Prophet. I fought with them in God's path. I am looking forward to the reward of these actions." "As for me," Umer said, "I would like to be exonerated of my actions so that good and evil become equal, and I have neither sins nor reward. All I would have to my credit then would be what I did in the company of the Prophet."

How Man Loses Out

If you give someone one dollar, and then tell him that there are a million dollar bills lying ahead, which can all be his if he runs to get them, then he is not going to bother about the one dollar; he will forget all about it and rush for the fortune.

So it is with this world and the hereafter. The present world is a preview of the hereafter. Here, man receives in embryonic form the joys and blessings which God has made fully available in the world to come. This is so that he may see the infinite joys of eternity in the guise of the incomplete blessings of this world; so that he may see one drop of water, and realize that it is indicative of a vast ocean beyond.

One who understands the true nature of this world will look at it like the one dollar bill which one forsakes for a fortune. He will look beyond the ephemeral pleasures of this world to the eternal joys of the hereafter. Only one who does not see the world in its true light will set store in it, making it his ultimate goal instead of the Hereafter.

The sun shines in order to acquaint man with the radiance of the after life; but man looks at the sun and makes it his object of worship. Flower's and trees blossom in order to remind man of the beauty of God's' eternal world; but man looks at them as the ultimate form of beauty, and makes his own paradise among them. The pleasures of this world should serve to increase one's longing for the world to come; but man becomes so engrossed in them that he fails to even think of the infinitely greater joys of the hereafter.

One who is seduced by the alluring pleasures of this world loses out on the next world. What anguish and despair he will feel when he reaches that world, and beholds the eternal blessings which it has to offer. He will realize then his foolishness. "This," he will cry out, "is the true life. Earthly life has no reality now. But I have lost eternal life for the sake of the transitional blessings of the world. I have forfeited true and lasting bliss – all for the sake of pleasures which did not endure. In seeking freedom on earth, where there was no freedom to be found, I lost the true freedom that is to be had now."

The Earth has immense store of heat energy. By cooling the earth by 0.001 degree Celsius we could keep the world supplied with its full requirement of electricity (at the 1976 level) for 25, 192 years.

No Escape

Westerners visit India in large numbers nowadays. Those who stay in expensive five-star hotels expect to be provided with everything they require, including their favourite food. Since cow meat is generally very popular in the west, they expect it to be available in the hotels they stay in. So hoteliers include the words “beef steak” in the menu that they present before their customers.

Since the consumption of cow meat is prohibited in India, the news that beef steak was an article on hotel menus aroused strong criticism in the country. One MP raised the question in parliament, and the government initiated investigations. Hotel managers told officials that they did indeed give their customers “beef”, but the word “beef” – according to the dictionary – is used for the meat of both buffaloes and cows; what they were providing was buffalo meat, not cow meat.

On May 4, 1984, the Minister of Health gave a statement to parliament in New Delhi. As the Times of India reported next day, ‘the minister read out the Oxford dictionary meaning of “beef”, which included the flesh of buffalo as well, and not merely that of cow or ox.’

The newspaper headline was: “Five star hotels saved by the dictionary.” People read about this sort of thing happening in the present world, and are deceived into thinking that things will be much the same in the next world; they think that just as “dictionaries” come to people’s rescue in this world, so they will find some “dictionary” in the world to come, which will save them from impending calamities. But they could not be more wrong. The reason that a show of words can rescue one from a tight corner in this world is that here one is dealing with mortals the like of oneself. But in the next world one will be dealing with the Lord of the Universe, and there will be no way of tricking Him.

Only if one’s case is based on reality will one be able to escape punishment in the next world. Words which are not supported by reality will be of no use to anyone.

14 November 1984

Great Man

No man is truly great who is great only in his life time. The test of greatness is the page of history.

William Hazliti

Quiet Endeavour

On December 17, 1903, the brothers Orville and Wilbur Wright became the first men to successfully pilot a heavier-than-air craft under both control and power.

Orville and Wilbur Wright were bicycle makers from Ohio. When they set out to construct a flying-machine, they started from the most primitive constructions, and persevered until they had developed a craft fit to usher in a new age for man. While engaged in their preparation, they maintained utmost secrecy. In order to ensure privacy, they bought a 600 acre farm in Kitty Hawk, a remote spot on the North Carolina coast. They made no attempts to publicize their project. When the first flight was made, Harry P. Moore, marine reporter for the Norfolk Virginian Pilot, heard the news 55 minutes later from a guardsman at Kitty Hawk, Dan Simpoon. He gave Moore the news that Orville Wright had been aloft for 12 seconds and had covered 120 feet.

This sensational news was received with scepticism by most national newspapers. When Moore sent out telegraph queries to newspapers all over the country, only five papers printed it. How could two unknown brothers, they thought, have achieved such a wondrous feat?

At the same time, much-publicized efforts to make the first flight in the history of man were continuing up the coast at Widewater, Virginia. The site was about thirty miles south of Washington D.C., the capital of America, and the eyes of the nation were on the project. The machine prepared there was the product of Samuel P. Langley, who was then America's most distinguished aeronautical scientist. Despite having the advantage of funds, publicity and expert know-how, their attempts to make the first flight were unsuccessful. They had two failures, the last on December 10, 1903, before the Wright's epic feat.

The Wrights achieved by quiet endeavour what others could not achieve by much-publicized preparation. They kept their sights set firmly on the goal ahead of them, and forsook all other considerations. This is summed up in the response of Orville Wright to a question put to him after World War II, when terrible destruction had been unleashed by the airplanes that had developed from his basic model. Had Wright thought that their invention would be used for such dreadful purposes as was now the case? "That day at Kitty Hawk," he replied, "we thought only of getting off the ground."

Lessons for Us to Learn

The Emperor Akbar (1543-1605) had his capital at Fatehpur Sikri, 45 kilometres from Agra. One of the many buildings in this city was the Ibadat Khana (House of Worship), which has since been buried underground and covered in trees and shrubs. As the Times of India reported on June 8, 1984, the Archaeological Institute of India, in collaboration with Aligarh Muslim University, have made excavations in the area, and the remains of the Ibadat Khana have now been uncovered.

In this Ibadat Khana, Akbar used to sit in the company of religious scholars and hold theological discussions. It was here that he conceived of his famous Din-i-Ilahi, or divine religion – a blend of all the different religions of India. Akbar wanted to found a national religion, one that would be acceptable to all his subjects. Religious diversity was, he believed, the cause of political instability in India: the people of the sub-continent would never unite under one ruler until their religion was one. Changing people's religion through missionary work seemed an arduous task to him, so instead he "devoted himself," as one historian has put it, "to the evolution of a new religion, which would, he hoped, prove to be a synthesis of all the warring creeds and capable of uniting the discordant elements of his vast empire in one harmonious whole."

Quoted in "An Advanced History of India" (Macmillan, India) p. 451.

While preparing his Din-i-Ilahi, Akbar felt a need to know more about Christianity, so he wrote to the King of Portugal asking to be sent a Persian translation of the Bible. The Christian monarch did this, but Akbar found it insufficient for his needs. He required someone to explain Christian teachings to him as well. So he wrote to the Pope in Rome, asking for qualified teachers of Christianity to be sent to him. Without delay, the Vatican dispatched two trained theologians to the court of Akbar at Fatehpur Sikri.

The two Jesuit priests, Fr Aquaviva and Fr Monserrate, arrived in Fatehpur Sikri on February 28, 1590, and were accommodated in the Khushbu Khana (Fragrant room), next to the Ibadat Khana. A painting in the Akbar-Nama shows the Emperor enrapt in deep discussion with them. They were not just ordinary priests; they were highly trained missionaries, clever enough to convert the Khushbu Khana into a chapel – the first in northern India.

In the report that Fr Aquaviva and Fr Monserrate submitted to the Pope, they wrote that Akbar was, on an intellectual level, readying himself for conversion to Christianity; what prevented him from taking this step, they said, was the fact that Christianity would not have provided him with the power-base that he was really looking for. Even after despairing of converting Akbar, at least one of the priests remained in Fatehpur Sikri preaching Christianity amongst his subjects. There are extensive carvings of David's fish – a famous Christian emblem – in the ruins of Fatehpur Sikri which prove this.

There are two main lessons for us to learn from this episode. One is that kings, and people in power generally, tend to hold their power dearer to them than anything else. They will not accept a faith or creed which – however sensible it may seem to them – is detrimental to their power. This is something that Christians experienced in preaching to Muslims, but it, is something that Muslims must remember when preaching their faith as well. Islam must never be made to appear a threat to the power of those to whom it is addressed, for if it is they will put their power first and Islam second, however true and reasonable the latter may appear to them.

We can also learn from the way the Pope, as soon as he was asked, was in a position to send two fully-equipped instructors to Akbar's court. The same demand has been made of Muslims time and time again in modern times, but they have not been able to fulfill it. There is one reason alone for this failure, and that is a lack of missionary spirit. Christians, despite the fact that their religion is culturally and historically based in the west, have for centuries been in a position to send missionaries to work in both east and west. This is because they are moved by a universal missionary spirit which enables them to do this. Muslims, on the other hand, despite the fact that their religion is a universal one, are bereft of missionary spirit, so they have not been able to fulfill the demands of either east or west in the field of missionary work.

The sorry state that Muslims find themselves in nowadays is due entirely to this failure. As bearers of the final divine scripture, the status of the Muslims is that of witnesses to the truth on earth. What this means is that their purpose in life should be to proclaim the word of God. This should be the target at which all their efforts are aimed; if they concentrate on it then their efforts will find fulfillment. But if they lose sight of it and vainly pursue other ends, then they will lose all unity of purpose; no action that they perform will reap results.

The Boat that Carries Us

The Earth, the Quran says, has been spread out like a carpet beneath our feet:

“God made the Earth for you a carpet so that you may travel on its open roads.” (71:19-20)

This “carpet” is the Earth’s crust: a thin layer of only a few miles, resting on a sea with a radius of 3,750 miles. At the bottom of the sea is a foaming layer of hot fluid; above that are rocks still in fusion; then rocks undergoing geological transformation; then cold water which is the very life of the earth above it. Folds have been formed in the earth, fashioning mountain ranges above, and forging the earth into its substrata like a boat in water. The earth is dependent on subterranean fluid to stay afloat just as a boat is dependent on water.

This is an intricate system, delicately balanced. If the system is misused, the balance will be disturbed. Overuse of water, for instance, through overpopulation or over rapid industrialization, besides causing pollution in the atmosphere above, causes the earth to sink on its bed below.

This is what is happening in Mexico City. With 16 to 17 million people living in just 590 square miles of federal territory, it is the most populous conurbation in the world. The city is already situated in a bowl between high mountain, which act as a trap for air-pollution. Now this bowl is sinking still further. First detected in 1925, submergence of the city at a rate of about 10 cms per year, is thought to have commenced much earlier. It is caused by over-exploitation of the water layer in its subsoil.

The mountains have been fixed into the earth, the Quran says, and the earth made even, so that man might take thought (88:19-20). If he does this, aware of the way in which nature has been made to accord with his needs, then he will be careful to live in a way that does not disrupt the order that sustains him. If he plunders nature, or disturbs its balance, then he will be digging a hole in his own boat.

Mohammad: The Prophet of Islam

Part I, Chapter IV

The Prophet was a man like other men. Joyous things would please him while sad things would sadden him. Realization of the fact that he was first and foremost God's servant, however, prevented him from exceeding the limits set by God.

Towards the end of the Prophet's life Maria Qibtiya bore him a beautiful and vivacious son, The Prophet named him Abraham, after his most illustrious ancestor. It was Abu Rafi who broke the good news to the Prophet. He was so overjoyed that he presented Abu Rafi with a slave. He used to take the child in his lap and play with him fondly. According to Arab custom, Abraham was given to a wet nurse, Umm Burda bint Mundhir Ibn Zaid Ansari, to be breast fed. This lady was the wife of a blacksmith, and her small house was usually full of smoke. Still, the Prophet used to go to the blacksmith's house to visit his son, putting up – in spite of his delicate disposition – with the smoke that used to fill his eyes and nostrils. Abraham was just one and half years old when, in the tenth year of the Hijra (January 632AD), he died. The Prophet wept on the death of his only son, as any father would. In this respect the Prophet appears like any other human being. His happiness and his grief were that of a normal father. But with all that, he fixed his heart firmly on the will of God. Even in his grief, these were the words he uttered:

“God knows, Abraham, how we sorrow at your parting. The eye weeps and the heart grieves, but we will say nothing that may displease the Lord.”

It so happened that the death of Abraham coincided with a solar eclipse. From ancient times people had believed that solar and lunar eclipses were caused by the death of some important person. The people of Medina began attributing the eclipse to the death of the Prophet's son. This caused the Prophet immense displeasure, for it contradicted man's humble position in the world. He collected the people and addressed them as follows:

“Eclipses of the sun and moon are not due to the death of any human being; they are just two of God's signs. When you see an eclipse, then you should pray to God.”

On one of his journeys, the Prophet asked his companions to roast a goat. One volunteered to slaughter the animal, another to skin it, and another to cook it. The Prophet said that he would collect wood. “Messenger of God,” his companions protested, “we will do all the work.” “I know that you will do it,” the Prophet replied, “but that would amount to discrimination, which I don't approve of. God does not like His servants to assert any superiority over their companions.”

So humble was the Prophet that he once said:

“By God, I really do not know, even though I am God’s messenger, what will become of me and what will become of you.”

One day Abu *Dharr Ghefari* was sitting next to a Muslim who was black. Abu Dharr addressed him as “Black man”. The Prophet was very displeased on hearing this, and told Abu Dharr to give full measure. “Whites are not superior to blacks,” he added. As soon as the Prophet admonished him, Abu Dharr became conscious of his error. He cast himself to the ground in remorse, and said to the person he had offended: “Stand up, and rub your feet on my face.”

The prophet once saw a wealthy Muslim gathering up his loose garment to maintain a distance from a poor Muslim sitting next to him. “Are you scared of his poverty clinging to you,” the Prophet remarked.

A Muslim state, with the Prophet at its head, had been established in Medina. It was at this time that Prophet had to borrow some money from a Jew by the name of Zaid Ibn Sana’a. A couple of days before the fixed date for the payment of the debt, the Jew came to demand his money back. He went up to the Prophet, caught hold of his clothes, and said to him harshly: “Mohammad, why don’t you pay me my due. From what I know of the descendants of Muttalib, they all put off paying their debts. “Umer was with the Prophet at the time. He became very angry, scolded the Jew and was on the point of beating him up. But the Prophet just kept smiling. All he said to the Jew was: “There are still three days left for me to fulfill my promise.” Then he addressed Umer. “Zaid and I deserved better treatment from you,” he said. “You should have told me to be better at paying my debts, and him to be better at demanding them. Take him with you, Umer, and pay him his due; in fact, give him 20 sa’as (about forty kilo’s) of dates extra, because you have alarmed him with your threats.”

So successful was the Prophet’s life that, during his lifetime, he became the ruler of the whole of Arabia right up to Palestine. Whatever he said, as the messenger of God, was accepted as law. He was revered by his people as no other man has ever been revered. Urwa Ibn Masud was sent as an envoy of the Quraish in the negotiations that preceded the Treaty of Hudaibiya (6AH). He was amazed to see that the Muslims would not let any water used by the Prophet for ablution, fall on the ground, but would catch it in their hands, and rub it on their bodies. Such was their veneration for him. Anas, the Prophet’s close companion, says that in spite of the great love they had for the Prophet, they could not look him full in the face. According to Mughira, if any of the Prophet’s companions had to call on him, they would tap on the door with their fingernails. One night, when the moon was full, the Prophet lay asleep, covered in a red sheet. Jabir Ibn Samra says that sometimes he would look at the moon and sometimes at the Prophet. Eventually he came to the conclusion that Prophet was the more beautiful of the two. The Muslims had the worst of the fighting in the initial stages of the Battle of Hunayn. Arrows rained down on the Prophet from the enemy ranks, but his followers formed a ring around him, letting the arrows strike their own bodies. It was as though they were made of wood, not flesh and blood; indeed the arrows hung from the bodies of some of them like thorns of a cactus tree.

Devotion and veneration of this nature can produce vanity in a man and engender a feeling of superiority, but this was not the case with the Prophet. He lived among others as an equal. No bitter criticism or provocation would make him lose his composure. Once a desert-dweller came up to him and pulled so hard at the sheet he was wearing that it left a mark on his neck. "Mohammad!" he said. "Give me two camel-loads of goods, for the money in your possession is not yours, nor was it your father's." "Everything belongs to God," the Prophet said, "and I am His servant." He then asked the desert-dweller, "Hasn't it made you afraid, the way you treated me?" He said not. The Prophet asked him why. "Because I know that you do not requite evil with evil," the man answered. The Prophet smiled on hearing this, and had one camel-load of barley and one of dates given to him.

The Prophet lived in such awe of God that he was always a picture of humility and meekness. He spoke little and even the way he walked suggested reverence for God. Criticism never angered him. When he used to put on his clothes, he would say: "I am God's servant, and I dress as befits a servant of God." He would sit in reverential posture to partake of food, and would say that this is how a servant of God should eat.

He was very sensitive on this issue. Once a companion addressed him, saying, "If it be the will of God, and the will of the Prophet." The Prophet's face changed colour in anger when he heard this. "Are you trying to equate me with God?" he asked the man severely. "Rather say: 'If God, alone, wills.'" On another occasion a companion of the Prophet said: "He that obeys God and His Prophet is rightly guided, and he who disobeys them has gone astray. You are the worst of speakers," the Prophet observed, disliking a reference which placed him on the same plane as the Almighty.

Three sons were born to the Prophet, all of whom died in infancy. His four daughters, all by his first wife, Khadija, grew to adulthood. Fatima was the Prophet's youngest daughter, and he was extremely attached to her. When he returned from any journey the first thing he would do, after praying two raka'ats in the mosque, was to visit Fatima and kiss her hand and forehead. Jumai Ibn Umair once asked Aisha whom the Prophet loved most. "Fatima," she replied.

But the Prophet's whole life was moulded by thoughts of the hereafter. He loved his children, but not in "any worldly way. Ali, Fatima's husband, once told Ibn Abdul Wahid a story about the Prophet's most beloved daughter. Fatima's hands, he said, were blistered from constant grinding; her neck had become sore from carrying water: her clothes would become dirty from sweeping the floor. When the Prophet had received an influx of servants from some place, Ali suggested to his wife that she approach her father and ask for a servant. She went, but could not speak to the Prophet because of the crowd. Next day, he came to their house, and asked Fatima what she had wanted to see him about. Ali told the Prophet the whole story, and said that he had sent her. "Fear God, Fatima," the Prophet said, "Fulfill your obligations to the Lord, and continue with your housework. And when you go to bed at night, praise God thirty-three times, and glorify him with the same number of times; exalt his name thirty-four times, and that will make a full hundred. This would be much better than having a servant." "If that is the

will of God and His Prophet,” Fatima replied, “then so it be.” This was the Prophet’s only reply. He did not give her a servant.

The truth revealed to the Prophet was that this world did not spring up by itself, but was created by one God, who continues to watch over it. All men are His servants, and responsible to Him for their actions. Death is not the end of man’s life; rather it is the beginning of another, permanent world, where the good will enjoy the bliss of paradise and the wicked will be cast into a raging hell. With the revelation of this truth also came the commandment to propagate it far and near. Accordingly, ascending the height of the rock of Safa, the Prophet called the people together. First he made mention of the greatness of God. Then he went on to say:

By God, as you sleep so will you die, and as you awaken so will you be raised after death: you will be taken to account for your deeds. The good will be rewarded with good and the evil with evil. And, for all eternity, the good will remain in heaven and the evil will remain in hell.

Even one who goes against the times in his personal life is faced with difficulties at almost every step, but these difficulties are not of an injurious nature. They may wound one’s feelings, but not one’s body. At the most, they are a test requiring quite forbearance. But things are quite different when one makes it one’s mission to publicly oppose convention – when one starts telling people what they are required to do and what not to do. The Prophet was not just a believer; he was also entrusted with conveying the word of God to others. It was this latter role that brought him into headlong collision with his countrymen. All forms of adversity – from the pain of hunger to trepidation of battle were inflicted on him. Yet throughout the twenty-three years of his mission, he always remained just and circumspect in his actions. It was not that there were no human feelings in him to embitter him; it was simply that his conduct was governed by the fear of God.

Three years after the Prophet’s migration to Medina, Meccan opponents mounted an assault on Medina and the Battle of Uhud took place. At the beginning, the Muslims held sway; but later on a mistake by some of the Prophet’s companions gave the enemy the chance to attack from the rear and sway the tide of battle in their favour. It was a desperate situation and many of the companions started fleeing from the field. The Prophet was left alone, encircled by the armed forces of the enemy. Like hungry wolves, they advanced upon him. The Prophet started calling to his companions. “Come back to me, O, servants of God,” he cried. “Isn’t there anyone who will sacrifice his life for my sake, who will fend these oppressors off from me and be my companion in paradise?”

Imagine how dreadful the situation must have been, with the Prophet crying for help in this manner. Some of his companions responded to his call, but such confusion reigned at the time that even these gallant soldiers were not able to protect him fully. Utba Ibn Abi Waqqas hurled a stone at the Prophet’s face, knocking out some of his lower teeth. A famed warrior of the Quraish, Abdullah Ibn Qumayya, attacked him with a battle-axe, causing two links of his helmet to stick into his face. So deep did they

penetrate into the Prophet's skin that Abu Ubaida broke two teeth in his attempt to extract them. Then it was the turn of Abdullah Ibn Shahab Zuhri, who threw a stone at the Prophet and injured his face. Bleeding profusely, he fell into a pit. When for a long period the Prophet was not seen on the field of battle, the word went around that he had been martyred. Then one companion spotted the Prophet lying in the pit. Seeing him to be alive, he cried jubilantly, "The Prophet is here." The Prophet motioned to him to be silent, so that the enemy should not know where he was lying.

In this dire situation, the Prophet uttered some curses against certain leaders of the Quraish, especially Safwan, Suhail and Haris. "How can a people who wound their prophet ever prosper!" he exclaimed. Even this was not to God's liking, and Gabriel came with this revelation:

"It is no concern of yours whether He will forgive or punish them. They are wrongdoers."
(Quran, 3:128)

This admonition was enough for the Prophet. His anger subsided. Crippled with wounds, he started praying for the very people who had wounded him. Abdullah Ibn Masood later recalled how the Prophet was wiping the blood from his forehead, and at the same time praying:

"Lord, forgive my people, for they know not what they do."

Biographies of the Prophet are full of incidents of this nature, which show his life to be a perfect model for mankind. They show that man is God's servant, and a servant he should remain in every condition. Being God's humble servant, man should always remain in a state of trepidation before this Lord and the life hereafter. Everything in the universe should serve to remind him of God. In every event he should see the hand of the Almighty, and, for him, every object should portray God's signs. In every worldly matter he should remember that all matters will finally be referred to God. Fear of hell should make him live humbly among his fellows, and longing for paradise should impress on him the significance of this world. So conscious should he be of God's greatness that any idea of demonstrating his own greatness should appear ridiculous. No criticism should provoke him, and no praise should make him vain. This is the ideal human character which God displayed to us in the conduct of His Prophet.